

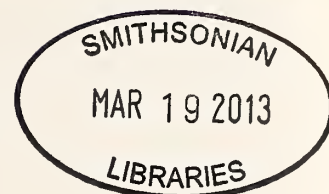
# ANTHRONOTES™

MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY PUBLICATION FOR EDUCATORS

VOLUME 31 NO. 2 FALL 2010

## TOURISTS AND STRANGERS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

by Lyra Spang



*Chichen Itza has mystified people for hundreds of years.... A three hour journey... takes you to the most breathtaking ruins in the Maya world. The climb up the famous pyramid named El Castillo will afford you the most magnificent views over the surrounding miles of lush jungle and across what was a thriving city over twelve hundred years ago.* (Chichen Itza Tours <http://www.chichen-itza-tour.com/>)

The international tourism industry is an extreme expression of the forces of globalization, temporarily bringing peoples together who in previous eras might not even have known of one another's existence. The "eco-cultural" tours offered at Chichen Itza (see above quote) exemplify the cultural tourism that explicitly focuses on exposing clients to a different culture, usually in another country from that of the tourists. This juxtaposition creates a dynamic space where different cultures, classes, nationalities, and identities interact in new and sometimes dramatic ways.

The multiple effects of international cultural tourism force us to rethink the role and the tools of anthropology as we search for ways to understand these temporally brief yet culturally critical encounters. Tourism provides an ideal place for anthropologists to explore key questions about identity production; "the other"; boundaries between different ethnic and cultural groups; and cultural exchange, change, and commoditization. All these topics bear on anthropological thinking and theory regarding questions of identity, power, human action/agency, and culture.

A focus on tourism—whether development or cultural heritage tourism—and on the cultural, environmental and socio-economic effects of tourism emerges from an examination of the recent anthropological lit-

erature. For example, archaeological work dealing with tourism includes discussions on how to simultaneously promote tourism and yet also preserve fragile historical structures for future generations. Socio-cultural anthropologists have explored the tourism industry's negative effects, especially the problem of competition over scarce resources and the concept of relative deprivation, comparing the tourists' economic status with that of the local population. Linguistic analysis can also be applied to the construction, commodification, and exoticization of "the other" cultures as seen in cultural tourism advertising.

### Archaeology and Tourism

Archaeologists have become increasingly preoccupied with tourism, as the industry's growth has led to more and more sites being evaluated, excavated, and presented specifically for tourist consumption. In the 1970s, archaeology focused on the formation of general laws and paid little attention to the political and ethical implications of archaeological work. In recent years more socially aware and critically engaged forms of archaeology have emerged. For example, archaeologist Dean Saitta argues for an "explanatory, emancipatory archaeology" that engages with contemporary populations who have a stake in the site being researched (Saitta 2007). Similarly, Quetzil Castañeda raises the question of stakeholders, local groups that have a vested interest in or connection with an archaeological



site, and holds that they should be consulted and involved in the research that affects them (Castañeda 2008).

Castañeda's argument in favor of stakeholder involvement expresses concerns regarding ownership of heritage and diversity of voice in decision-making processes. Similar issues are raised in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) law that requires archaeologists working in the United States to respect Native American stakeholder wishes with regards to ancestral remains. Some archaeologists feel that NAGPRA, rather than being a stumbling block for archaeological research, provides an opportunity to build a positive and mutually beneficial relationship with Native American stakeholders (Dongoske 2000). Applying this cooperative approach to a broader context, both within and outside of the United States, is the goal of pro-engagement archaeologists.

Do archaeologists have a responsibility towards the way archaeological sites are marketed, especially if local stakeholders do not benefit from the tourist promotion? Do archaeologists have the power or the responsibility to address such issues as the flow of Mexican government funds into their field region? What, Traci Ardren asks, is the archaeologist's role in cases where sites may be misrepresented to the public in order to increase tourist revenue or where local stakeholders are denied access to tourism revenue that stems from an excavation. Is the archaeologist morally obligated to try to ensure that the site is accurately represented or that the local people benefit from its excavation and public use as a tourist attraction? (Ardren 2004).

The response of archaeologists to the reality of tourism has been varied. Many archaeologists now engage in outreach activities such as local educational projects and excavation site tours, attempting to ensure that both local stakeholders and government authorities appreciate the importance of a site beyond its potential to attract tourist revenue. Some archaeologists, especially those working in their home countries, have gone further, helping communities secure funds and build site museums to retain valuable archaeological artifacts in the region in an effort to develop local pride in the region's history and reap economic benefits through tourism and other activities. Archaeologists interested in how their discipline can serve living stakeholders' needs are vocal about and active in draw-

ing local communities into their work through education, outreach, and collaboration. They may even select or develop certain research projects in response to or in cooperation with involved stakeholders.

But when working in a foreign country, archaeologists rarely have the power or authority to persuade government officials to change tourist development projects so as to include the local people. In Mexico's Mundo-Maya ("World of the Maya") region, where Chichen Itza is located, archaeology, tourism, and ethics intertwine within the context of a Mexican tourism industry that inevitably benefits from the presence of spectacular monuments. In this region, the state tourism agency is closely linked to archaeological work specifically aimed at developing tourism sites. It is from such sites that important artifacts are often removed to the capital, leaving no development benefit for local populations. Archaeologist Tracy Ardren and others ask how and why it is that contemporary indigenous peoples are so often excluded from the economic and social benefits of the prehistoric sites that their ancestors built.

Many archaeologists consider their role to be necessarily limited by political, financial, and academic realities, but urge their fellow academics to take what steps they can to ensure that their sites are not misused, and that they bring benefit to the local people.

### **Socio-cultural and Linguistic Aspects of Tourism**

International tourism's peculiar form of global encounter challenges anthropologists to reconsider the nature of international forces shaping people's identity, culture, economic development, and experiences of inequality. Within this context, international tourism acts as a catalyst for producing, maintaining, and transforming identities, often fostering cross-cultural comparison, adoption, and exchange not only of money and material goods but of ideas, identities, and conceptualizations of the self and others. Unlike the flow of goods, information, and money commonly associated with globalization, the movement of tourists typically involves a high degree of face-to-face cultural interaction. Tourism creates a distinctive inter-cultural space where geographically disparate groups temporarily observe and interact with each other in what is often a carefully-structured but also power-saturated and unequal environment.



Anthropologists and other social scientists have strongly critiqued the implicit assumption that tourism always brings benefits to local populations. Some anthropologists have focused on how disparities of wealth and power are highlighted when cultural tourism fosters encounters between rich tourists and relatively poor local peoples. Tamar Wilson discusses the various effects of tourism on socio-economic, cultural, and environmental realities in Latin America, arguing that the economic disparities that commonly exist between tourists and locals in places like Mexico “produce a de facto economic apartheid” (Wilson 2008: 15).

One result of this conspicuous economic disparity is the “demonstration effect”: a sense of resentment by locals towards tourists combined with a desire to enjoy the same luxuries and advantages (Wilson 2008). The demonstration effect is closely linked to a sense of relative deprivation on the part of the economically less well-off members of the tourist encounter. Wilson claims that cultural or “ethnic” tourism can be described as exploitative by default because “tourists from core capitalist countries cast their gaze on indigenous, often poverty stricken peoples with little political power...” (Wilson 2008: 16). Malcom Crick argues that tourists visit developing countries because such vacations are cheap, thus directly exploiting the poverty and low wages of the host country and its citizens (Crick 2002).

### **Tourism and Development**

Some anthropologists examine how the contribution and effects of tourism on local economies and cultures can be improved. A topic of particular interest is the intersection between tourism and development. Brazilian anthropologists Roberto Bartholo, Mauricio Delamaro, and Ivan Bursztyn note that not all tourism is equal, and that smaller-scale tourism projects that directly involve local communities are much more likely to benefit marginalized groups than are large-scale resort developments, especially if the latter are internationally owned. The international tourism industry, however, continues to favor large projects and foreign investment by the “global elite.” This results in fewer benefits for local peoples and the concentration of tourist development in key regions, leaving others deprived of tourism revenue.



*Tourists at Chichen Itza. Photo courtesy Traci Ardren.*

Within this context of conspicuous consumption and economic disparity, the capacity of tourism to fundamentally alter conceptualizations of the self and the “other” should not be underestimated. The temporary proximity of “tourist” and “local” allows for the close comparison of different lives, identities, economic statuses, cultures, and values. Participants in the tourist space exchange, contest, adopt, transform, and reconstruct identity markers and

*(continued)*

draw conclusions about the identity, culture, and relative economic status and power of both themselves and others. Both tourists and locals are exposed, via the tourism encounter, to “the other.” The power dynamics of such exposure are unequal from the outset. Aside from the common experience of economic disparity and accompanying differentials in power, local groups that are objects of visitor interest suffer from the exoticizing stereotypes of tourist industry advertising that prefigure tourist expectations about the “other.” According to Toby Alice Volkman, under this tourist “gaze,” the question of who defines cultural “authenticity” becomes fraught with power struggles as different stakeholders seek to determine the form and expression of the marketed group’s cultural identity (Volkman 1990).

Benedict Anderson’s concept of imagined communities provides a useful way to look at the new connections that are forged in some cultural tourism encounters (Anderson 1983). Because of tourism, people from Wisconsin and the highlands of Ecuador who would otherwise never meet may form connections that bridge cultures and continents and create new cross-cultural but imagined communities. Thus cultural tourism fosters encounters that result in both increased separation between different culture groups and a struggle over identity ownership and forging of new cross-cultural linkages. This results in some cases in the creation of new imagined communities that can span substantial geographic space.

### **Tourist Advertising**

Tourist advertising comprises a transnational, cross-cultural genre whose lingua franca is usually English and whose objective is the commodification and sale of people and places deemed appropriate for tourist consumption. Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of speech genres as being defined by their “own relatively stable types of utterances” is easily applied to the cultural tourism industry, where semantics and framing are important tools used in marketing the tourist product (Bakhtin 1986: 60). Although advertising may differ depending on the tourists’ background, for the most part the genre is amazingly homogenous despite its broad global dissemination. The messages and meanings of this tourist advertising function to create a cultural commodity palatable to the targeted tourist groups.

Cultural tourism is especially known for its exoticization of different groups via images and words that essentialize the cultures being commoditized. The tourist is presented with a coherent package of exotic otherness, enticingly described in a way that implies adventure, a dive into “the other,” and often, a trip back in time. Key words such as “exotic,” “native,” “natural,” “traditional,” “untouched,” and “ancient” help to focus on an image of “the other” that contrasts sharply with the tourist’s own personal identity.

Most tourists participating in cultural tourism are relatively well off and from developed, westernized countries. The construction of the exotic other as a primordial, natural being from the past is juxtaposed against the supposedly “modern,” “cosmopolitan,” and “urban” (or at least suburban) tourist. This implicit contrast is a fundamental component of the cultural tourism genre. For the tourist, the attraction lies in the “otherness” and the exotic nature of a place and its inhabitants. In order to adhere to the requirements of cultural tourism advertising, traces of modernity or signs of cosmopolitan identity are removed. Native peoples are always dressed in traditional garb, forests are described as “untouched,” temples as “ancient,” and local customs as “traditional.” Words and images are combined to create a timeless exotic sense of place, which represents a previous, more “natural” era, always in contrast to the tourist’s modern, hectic, and sophisticated life.

By creating and then juxtaposing the backwards, traditional, untouched, natural past represented by the tourist attraction—be it a culture group, an archaeological site, or a natural setting—with the modern, cosmopolitan, developed present embodied by the tourist, cultural tourism advertising emphasizes the exotic nature of what is being sold. At the same time, such advertising maintains the image of the tourist as modern and progressive.

The tourist advertising genre is found everywhere that tourism takes place. For the Mundo Maya region mentioned earlier, Ardren describes the “double whammy” of the simultaneous exoticization of gender and “the indigenous other” used formulaically by the Mexican state tourism agency in its advertisements (Ardren 2004: 108-111). Images of indigenous women, often partially nude, are juxtaposed with pictures of jaguars and Mayan ruins, explicitly linking today’s indigenous people with the past and with nature, and simultaneously divorcing them from any participation in the modern present.



## The Tourist “Gaze”

Linguistic ideologies play an important role in the framing of the generic traits of tourist advertising. Volkman and Adams discuss an example of this in their analysis of cultural tourism and the Toraja people of Indonesia (Adams 1997; Volkman 1990). Volkman describes what she calls the “tourist gaze.” This gaze, the result of the contrast between “modern” and “traditional” created by tourist advertising, reflects the ideologies behind the tourist industry that create stereotyped images of native or local peoples as natural and pre-modern. The way that the tourist advertising genre is deployed in Tana Toraja emphasizes the powerful position of the modern, westernized tourist and denies modernity to local inhabitants, who are objectified and marginalized as “primitive” and “traditional” (Adams 1997: 312).

The local groups, however, are not passive and often fight back against such stereotyping, albeit in sometimes subtle and indirect ways. Often people will try to distance themselves from the exoticized images of the tourist trade. By drawing tourist attention to the aspects of their identity that do not fit with the image portrayed by tourism advertising, these heavily marketed culture groups assert their own identities and express their own abilities to act for themselves (a phenomenon often called “agency” in current anthropological literature).

Alexis Celeste Bunten describes an example of “agency” in her analysis of native Alaskan tour guides. Arguing that culture itself must be simplified for tourist consumption, she details how the local tour guides both use and resist the imposition of what she calls a “commodified persona” (Bunten 2008: 386 and 381). Because their jobs as tour guides require them to express a stereotyped image of native Alaskan culture in order to achieve their economic goals, resistance to certain strands of the tourist narrative takes place covertly. As Bunten puts it, “...Native guides have the power to choose how to respond to the tourist gaze” (Bunten 2008: 382). They strike a delicate balance between emphasizing the grand history of the Tlingit people and selling tours on the strength of their cultural “authenticity” as Tlingit natives. At the same time, they attempt to ensure that tourists understand that the Tlingit people do not exist solely in a romanticized past, but also in the contemporary and modern American present. Guides

actively situate themselves in the modern day through references to television, business ownership, the Internet, and other aspects of mainstream American culture (Bunten 2008).

Bunten gives an example of how a guide displays “traditional” Tlingit knowledge within a modern frame. “Discussing local bear sightings on a tour, one guide explained that bears eat salmon berries, blueberries and huckleberries, but a major part of their diet comes from salmon. ‘They will rip the heads off and eat the fatty part of the body. They will eat 35 to 40 salmon a day until they reach what they call their fat content and then they will go into a waking hibernation and then into sleeping hibernation. Do you want to know where I learned all of that from? The Discovery Channel!’”

In telling this joke, this guide positions herself as someone who learns about nature by watching television (just like the tourists) rather than by an innate oneness with nature or through the lessons about bears offered by a wizened elder, observes Bunten (2008: 390). The tour guides depend financially upon the commodification, exoticization, and marketing of their culture and personal identity to interested tourists. Through jokes and other indirect methods, they simultaneously present a “commodified persona” and subvert the tourist advertising genre, asserting themselves as both Tlingit AND modern Americans.



*Tourists watching folk dances near Chichen Itza. Photo courtesy Traci Ardren.*

In Tana Toraja, Indonesia, tourism focuses on the elaborate funeral rites of the local population. Funerals are advertised to tourists the way festivals are in other parts of the world: joyous occasions of authentic cultural expression that a visitor should not miss (Adams 1997). Some people have altered their funeral rites to emphasize their Christianity, Western efficiency, and international connections, thus affirming their participation in globalized (Westernized) life as modern and cosmopolitan actors (Adams 1997). Their reasons for doing so recognize the colonially rooted fact that "Christianity...carried the prestige of world religion as opposed to primitive, backward, animist, locally rooted paganism" (Volkman 1990: 93).

Kathleen Adams explains how an important funeral in 1997 drew three very different audiences: locals, international tourists, and government officials from Java. The family faced a dilemma as to how to demonstrate social status and enact a meaningful ceremony while also presenting Toraja culture and identity to outsiders (Adams 1997). To avoid the usual stereotypes of primitive paganism long leveled against the Toraja and their elaborate funeral rites, the family assigned Adams as their personal anthropologist to greet the dignitaries and explain the ceremony to them (Adams 1997). Adams was explicitly instructed to emphasize the funeral's Christian nature, to downplay the elements that referenced long abandoned practices such as slavery and to emphasize the charitable nature of the large-scale sacrifices of buffalo, which were often deemed wasteful by government officials (Adams 1997: 313-16).

By using an academic outsider to disseminate their message, the family both demonstrated their high status and ensured that the officials would interpret the funeral in a way that reinforced the family's modern, cosmopolitan identity. At the same time the funeral remained an important cultural event for the family as Toraja people and an "authentic" experience for participating tourists.

## Conclusion

Cultural tourism challenges the discipline of anthropology through its politicized nature; its close relationship with archaeological sites; and its offering of new opportunities for examining cross-cultural processes of contact, identity formation, group boundary maintenance, and cultural exchange. Resistance to the stereotyping of tourism advertis-

ing provides another focus for new research. Future work should more clearly illustrate the effects of international tourism on identity creation and change. Archaeologists will continue to face challenges and opportunities for pro-active engagement as tourism industries drive and co-opt archaeological research and develop sites for tourist consumption. Examining the use of language in tourism advertising opens up research for linguistic anthropologists interested in the intersections among language, culture, and identity. International tourism provides a new and dynamic space for anthropological research that will challenge and stimulate archaeological, socio-cultural, and linguistic anthropology for years to come.

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